

Access to Justice 10th Anniversary Summit set for August 25 in Jackson

August 8, 2016

The Mississippi Access to Justice Commission will observe its 10-year anniversary Aug. 25 with a summit to reflect on a decade of work to improve civil legal access for the poor, and discuss the future.

The Access to Justice for All 10th Anniversary Summit will begin at 1:30 p.m. at the Mississippi Supreme Court in Jackson. The program is free and open to the public.

The summit will open with a retrospective and a look forward by past Co-chair Judge Denise Owens and current Co-Chair Rodger Wilder. Judge Owens, a Hinds County chancellor, recently concluded a decade as a leader of the Commission.

Presiding Justice Jess Dickinson said, "As Mississippi's Supreme Court, we have the primary responsibility for the fair and efficient administration of justice for all of our citizens. That responsibility encompasses many projects and initiatives, but none more important than the Court's duty to ensure fair and equal access to justice and to our courts for all persons, regardless of station in life. This summit is an opportunity, not only to collaborate and explore new ideas and better ways to accomplish our purpose, but also to meet together with and acknowledge those who labor every day in the trenches, fighting for this cause, and to express to them our gratitude for what they do."

At 5:30 p.m., Lisa Foster, director of the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Access to Justice, will give the keynote address. Foster previously served for 10 years as a California Superior Court judge in San Diego, where she presided over criminal, civil and family law departments. Foster began her legal career as a staff attorney at the Center for Law in the Public Interest in Los Angeles and later joined the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles. She also served as executive director of California Common Cause and was of counsel to the law firm of Phillips & Cohen, representing whistleblowers. Foster taught courses on sex discrimination, federal courts and election law as an adjunct professor at the University of San Diego School of Law.

A 2 p.m. panel discussion about pro bono efforts and technology innovation will include Access to Justice Commission Executive Director Tiffany Graves, Mississippi College School of Law Dean Wendy B. Scott and attorneys Jennie A. Eichelberger and Stephen P. Spencer.

At 3:15 p.m., American Civil Liberties Union Legal Director Paloma Wu and MacArthur Justice Center Director Cliff Johnson will talk about efforts to change misdemeanor criminal fine and fee collection practices that disproportionately affect the poor.

At 4:15 p.m., Justice Dickinson, Court of Appeals Judge Virginia C. Carlton and Chancellor Jacqueline Mask, co-chair of the Access to Justice Commission, will give judicial perspectives on access to justice.

A reception is scheduled for 6:30 p.m.

An estimated 695,000 people live at or below the poverty level in Mississippi. The Mississippi Center for Legal Services and North Mississippi Rural Legal Services are tasked with providing civil legal representation for those who cannot afford to hire a lawyer. The two agencies are inadequately staffed and funded. More than half of the people who seek Legal Services representation in Mississippi are turned away.

Organizations across the state are committed to improving the delivery of civil legal services to the poor. The Mississippi Supreme Court created the Access to Justice Commission in 2006 to unify the effort. Mississippi became the 23rd state to appoint an Access to Justice Commission when the Supreme Court issued its order on June 28, 2006.

For more information about the summit, contact Mississippi Access to Justice Commission Executive Director Tiffany Graves at 601-960-9581 or e-mail tgraves@msbar.org. The Access to Justice Commission website is www.msatjc.org.

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